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ACTIVE CHILDREN HEALTHY CHILDREN



AN ACTIVE LIVING GUIDE
FOR PARENTS

Canada

Our mission is to help the people of Canada
maintain and improve their health.

Health Canada

Health Canada would like to thank the following people
for their contribution to the development of this Guide:

John Belfry, Canadian Association for Health, Physical
Education, Recreation and Dance (CAHPERD)

Joe Doiron, Active Living Canada

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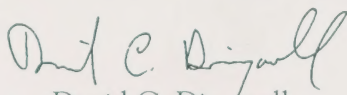
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MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER

The happiness of a healthy, active child can spark a lifelong interest in physical activity. Parents can help their children lead healthier lives by encouraging positive attitudes toward physical activity. The physical, mental and social benefits of active living begin during childhood and continue throughout life.

I have a special interest in the health and well-being of Canada's children and am pleased to present this new publication, *Active Children, Healthy Children*.

If you have a child between three and nine years of age, this guide will help you find ways to make physical activity a fun part of your child's daily life.


David C. Dingwall
Minister of Health

TAKE THE TEST

HOW ACTIVE IS YOUR CHILD?

Children seem pretty active, right? But are they physically active? Too often, we assume they get all the activity they need. Take this quiz to see if physical activity is a regular part of your child's life.



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YES NO

- | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Does your child watch less than 3 1/2 hours of television each day? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Does your child walk or bike to school? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Does your child take gym class (at least 30 minutes) at school every day? |

- [] [] As a family, do you take part in activities like hiking, biking, walking, swimming or skating?
- [] [] Does your child play outside most days?
- [] [] Is your child involved in organized sport or recreational activities in his or her school or in your community?
- [] [] Is your child physically active for more than three hours each week?

If you answered NO to ANY of these questions, your child may not be enjoying all the benefits of active living. DID YOU KNOW that...

- Children need at least 30 minutes of physical activity every day for good health.
- According to the Ontario Medical Association, children today are 40 percent less active than they were 30 years ago.
- The average child watches 26 hours of television each week. That doesn't include time spent on the computer and playing video games.

Inactivity among
Canadian children has
become a serious problem.
Do your part to change this
by helping your child develop
an active way of life.

ACTIVE LIVING AND YOUR CHILD

A WINNING COMBINATION!

As a parent, you want your child to grow and succeed. Physical activity is an important part of that. You can help your child by making physical activity part of everyday life. That means using opportunities at home, at school and during leisure time to be physically active. And it can mean a whole range of activities - from walking and playing catch, to more organized sports. With active living, every action counts!

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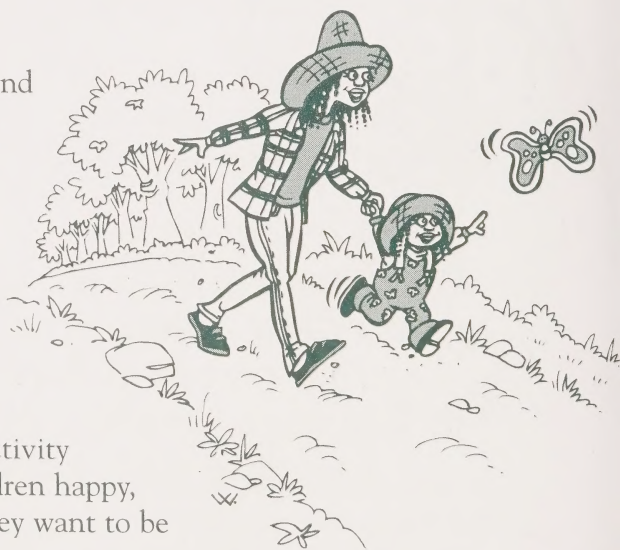
Both you and your child benefit from active living:



Happy children.

Play and physical activity make children happy, because they want to be active.

- **Healthy bodies.** Daily physical activity builds a healthy heart, encourages muscle growth and helps develop strong bones.



- **Rest and more nutritious eating.** Active children sleep better and have more “positive” energy when they are awake. They often have better eating habits than children who are less active.

- **Positive self-esteem.** Active living helps children feel good about themselves. It reduces anxiety and depression, and makes children more able to deal with stress.

- **Better grades.** Students who are physically active regularly do better at school. Active living gives them better concentration, memory, creativity and problem-solving skills/abilities.



- **Drug-free lives.** Active living shows children how to have fun without turning to tobacco, alcohol and other drugs.

- **Social time.** Active living provides opportunities for children to socialize, practise self-discipline and make friendships.

- **Parent-child bonding.** When you participate with your child, active living can improve your health and the bond you share.

THIS GUIDE

WHAT'S INSIDE?

Health Canada has worked with a number of partners to create *Active Children, Healthy Children: An Active Living Guide for Parents*. The purpose of the Guide is to help parents find ways to make physical activity part of their children's daily lives.

The Guide is divided into 11 parts:



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1. Active Living and Your Child:
How You Can Play a Part
2. Tips and Tools for Active Living with
Three- to Five-Year-Olds
3. Tips and Tools for Active Living with
Six- to Nine-Year-Olds
4. Ways to be Active at Home
5. Physical Activity at School
6. Making Physical Activity Part of
Leisure Time
7. Eat Smart, Rest Up
8. Tailor-made:
Choosing the Right Activities for
Your Child
9. Quality Checklist:
Do Your Child's Programs, Instructors
and Coaches Measure Up?
10. Active Living for Children with a
Disability
11. Contacts and Community Resources

ACTIVE LIVING AND YOUR CHILD

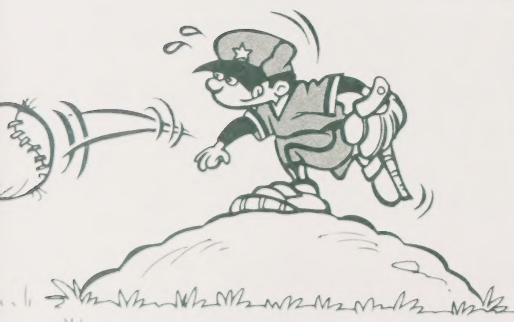
HOW YOU CAN PLAY A PART

Active living can improve the health and well-being of your children now and throughout their lives. Here are five things you can do to help your child make activity part of each day:

1. *Be a role model.*

Children learn by watching their parents. They like to copy the way their parents talk and act. Take advantage of this influence.

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Take a break from your own routine to play and be active with your child. Let your child see you enjoy the simple pleasures of taking a walk, riding a bike, gardening or being physically active around the house.

2. Help your child learn skills. To enjoy common physical activities and games, your child needs to know basic skills like running, jumping, throwing, catching and kicking. Children can learn the basics from you. Keep in mind that learning a new skill takes time and practice. Practise together and give them feedback. Contact your child's school to find out about his or her physical education program.

3. Encourage your child. Talk about the importance of having fun and don't push for perfection. Ask your child if he or she is having fun and give praise often when your child is learning something new. It's important to give lots of positive feedback. Here's how:

- When teaching a new skill, catch your child doing something right. Focus on what your child is doing well.
- Tell your child what he or she did right. Give praise. Smile at your child and make eye contact.
- Praise your child in front of other adults.

4. Provide your child with opportunities to be active. Look for ways you can make physical activity a part of your child's everyday life. Think about what you can do at home, at school and during leisure time.

5. Participate together in activities. Take time to be active as a family. Family time spent skiing, swimming, hiking, camping or playing ball will give your child a positive attitude about physical activity.

TIPS AND TOOLS FOR ACTIVE LIVING

WITH THREE- TO FIVE-YEAR- OLDS

The following ideas will help you meet the active living needs of children in the preschool ages.

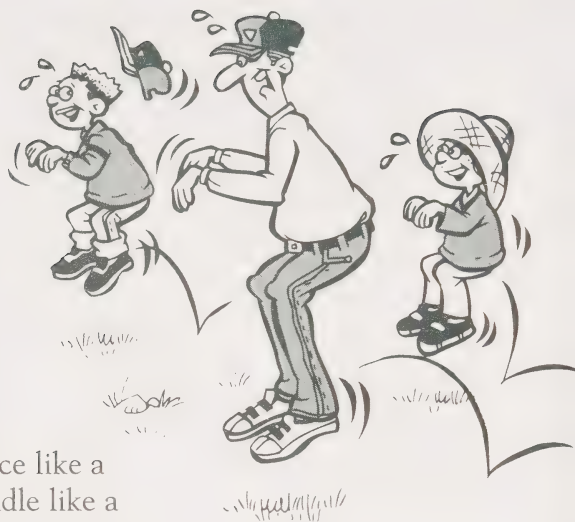
Tips

- Running, jumping, throwing, catching and kicking are part of most games and activities. By age five, your child has started learning most of these skills.
- For new activities, start with easy-to-learn patterns and move to the more difficult. Make sure your child is doing well and having fun. If not, change the activity. Use variety and make it fun by playing games, using themes or adding music.
- Show your child how to do activities safely. Supervise your child's play. Be a good role model. Keep the play area free of objects that might cause injury.

Tools

- **Help your child build an obstacle course in the house.** Use boxes, chairs, pillows and other household items. Use the play structures at the park.
- **Put on a child's record or tape.** Teach your child the "Hokey Pokey," "Head and Shoulders, Knees and Toes" or one of your favourite dances.





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- ***Play follow the leader.***

Dance like a ballerina, waddle like a duck or walk a straight line like a tight-rope walker. Copy the movements of animals (e.g., bunnies hopping, birds flying, horses kicking).

- ***Play blanket gymnastics.*** Use blankets on the floor where there is lots of room for a play area. Help your child do somersaults and headstands.

- ***Join or organize a play group with other parents.*** Contact the Parent Resource Centre in your community to help you get started.

- ***Enrol your child in swimming lessons*** or teach him or her how to swim yourself.

- ***Play catch together.*** Use softballs or bean bags to get started. Throw toward a target or goal.

TIPS AND TOOLS FOR ACTIVE LIVING

WITH SIX-TO NINE-YEAR- OLDS

Tips

- Ask your child what physical activities he or she likes to do. By now your child will have a good idea of what he or she enjoys. Encourage your child to follow his or her interests.
- Children at this age are getting better at coordinating their bodies. They may enjoy sports or dance. Activities that make your child breathe hard should be part of his or her active lifestyle.
- Have children wear proper protective equipment when playing sports and games, or doing things like bicycling or skating. Do the same yourself. Supervision is still important at this age, but let your child practise some independence.
- Children at this age like to be social and often prefer group activities. Encourage your child to play games with his/her brothers and sisters, and other children.
- Let your child try activities other than the usual sports shown on television. Bicycling, swimming, hiking and cross-country skiing are activities your child can continue to enjoy after graduating from school. Try different activities each season.

The following ideas will help you meet the active living needs of children in primary school.

Tools

- ***Provide basic pieces of sports equipment***

such as a soccer ball or basketball, or a skipping rope. Let children organize their own activities.

- ***Show your child how to do chores around the house.***

Children at this age can help to shovel snow, rake leaves or tend a garden.

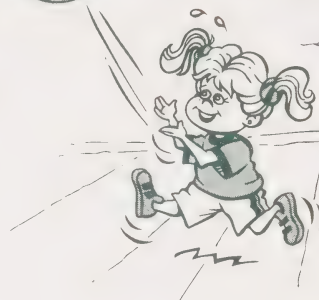
- ***Teach your child how to ride a bicycle.***

Make sure your child knows the rules of the road and wears a proper

helmet. Check his or her bicycle to make sure it's road-worthy.

- ***Enrol your child in Scouts, Guides or a Boys and Girls Club.*** This

can teach your child outdoor skills, and you can participate as well. Check in the phone book or call the recreation department in your community.



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WAYS TO BE ACTIVE AT HOME

Home is where the heart is! It's also a great place for you and your child to be active together. From the list below, find the activities you could take part in:

- ✓ Make a joint project with your child out of cleaning the playroom or folding the laundry.
- ✓ Put some music on and dance around the house with your child.
- ✓ Walk with your child to the corner store or to the mailbox.
- ✓ Go for a walk after dinner. Take a fruit for dessert on the go. Make it a family ritual. Set a goal to walk the same distance it would take to walk across Canada. Record how far you walk using a map on the fridge.
- ✓ Clear the snow from the front walk or driveway. Use it to make a fort.



- ✓ Let your child help you rake leaves in the fall. Pile them up and jump in when you're done!
- ✓ Help your child plant a garden in your yard or on the balcony, and teach him or her to look after it.
- ✓ Set "house rules" for television viewing, and playing video and computer games. One or two hours each day is a reasonable limit.
- ✓ Use soft indoor balls and play equipment to allow your child to create games inside. Indoor activities are a great way to keep active on cold or rainy days.
- ✓ Visit the local ice rink and skate with your child.
- ✓ Play tag, hide and seek or hopscotch, or skip rope.

Include time for
at least one of these
activities each day.



PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AT SCHOOL

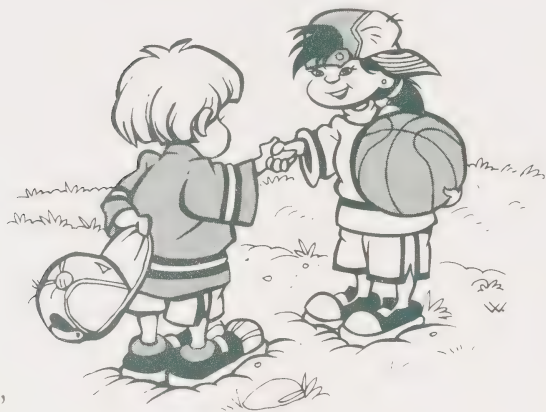
Each week, children spend 25 to 30 hours in school, mostly sitting. Students who are regularly physically active do better at school. Physical activity leads to better concentration, memory, creativity and problem solving. Quality Daily Physical Education (QDPE) at school is one way to make sure that your child is getting more of the physical activity that he or she needs and deserves. It's a good way to give your child more physical activity at no extra cost.

The QDPE Report Card asks a number of questions. Answer the questions below to see if your child's school makes the grade.

YES NO

- | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Is physical education (PE) offered daily to all students? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Does your child look forward to PE class? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Is the importance of an active healthy lifestyle emphasized in PE class? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Can all students participate regardless of sex, age, ability, ethnicity or socio-economic level? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Is your child learning new skills in a wide variety of activities? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Do the facilities and equipment provide a safe environment? |

- [] [] Is there a physical education specialist on staff?
- [] [] Is your child able to participate in a variety of intramural activities?
- [] [] Does the program promote fair play?



Any
"NO"

answers should be discussed with your principal. Nine "YES" answers means your school offers a quality physical education program.

If you live within a reasonable distance, why not walk your child to school one or two days each week.

MAKING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY PART OF LEISURE TIME

Free time at night, on weekends and during vacation can be used to add physical activity to your child's routine.

Build active living into leisure time with these tips:

- Have your child spend more time outdoors. Plan to be active outside several times each week.
- Work with your neighbours to build a skating rink. Let the children help.
- Gather other children in the neighbourhood for a game of road hockey or soccer in the park.
- Make a kite with your child from materials around home. Fly it together in the park.



- Take a walk with your child on the weekend.
- Offer to coach your child's minor sports team or help with his or her Scout or Guide troop.
- Make abandoned parking lots into active living spaces. Put up basketball nets or paint squares for hopscotch. Ask your community or town to put up lights for night-time use.
- Visit your local recreation centre, swimming pool or park with your child. Check with the YMCA, YWCA, Boys and Girls Club, Girl Guides, Scouts Canada and community recreation department in your area. Ask about activities for your child's age range. (Note: Many community agencies offer financial assistance to families.)
- Enrol your child in summer camp or day camp during school breaks. (Note: Many community agencies offer financial assistance to families.)
- Make use of indoor playgrounds.
- Use your vacation to waterslide, canoe, swim, hike or camp.

EAT SMART, REST UP

Active living works best with good nutrition and the right amount of sleep. Give your child the best chance to learn and grow, and meet the challenges of childhood.

Eat Smart

- Use *Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating* for direction. Copies are available from your local health department or from Publications, Health Canada, K1A 0K9.
- Use *Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating* to plan your shopping list. When shopping, choose foods from the four food groups first.
- Put a copy of the *Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating* on your fridge to remind your family which foods to eat more often.
- Encourage your child to eat breakfast before leaving for school. Set a good example by doing the same yourself.



- Children need to eat often, especially when active. Have nutritious snacks on hand.
- Provide your child with a variety of nutritious snacks like muffins, yogurt or vegetables and dip. Choose foods higher in salt and fat less often.
- Try to sit down as a family for at least one meal each day. Use meal times to talk to your child about his or her day.

Rest Up

- Allow your child eight to 10 hours of sleep each night.
- Set a regular bed time for your child. Read with your child before bed to help him or her unwind and improve reading ability.
- Provide a quiet environment for your child to sleep in.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT ACTIVITIES FOR YOUR CHILD

Between the ages of three and nine, children should try a variety of activities. It is too early to specialize in one activity or sport. Children need a balance of activities - indoor and outdoor, summer and winter, competitive and recreational, organized and unstructured - for a lifetime of active living. Here are some general tips to help you and your child choose:

Ask your child what he or she enjoys doing. By the age of six or seven, children have an idea of what activities they like. Children say they enjoy physical activity for improving skills, having fun, being with friends, experiencing thrills and excitement, achieving success and developing fitness. Have your child make a list of his or her likes and dislikes. Discuss it.

Don't let gender stereotypes limit activity choices for your child. Differences in physical ability between boys and girls are small during childhood. Provide a variety of toys and equipment (e.g., balls, bean bags, Frisbees) that are not easily labelled male or female.

Focus on fun and skill development. Children rate fun and the chance to develop and show skill as the most important parts of activity - ahead of winning and competing. Build on your child's natural strengths. Practise together to help your child improve. Give positive reinforcement by telling your child he or she is doing well, giving a pat on the back, or a "high five." Keep a scrap book of your child's successes. Use pictures and make notes to show progress.

Activities should provide realistic challenges. Challenges should match your child's skill development level. Ask your child to set his or her own limits. See how he or she is doing.

24 Activities should put winning in perspective. Children should try to win rather than win at all costs. Explain to your child that winning is not always possible. Children say they quit many activities because of conflicts with other activities, lack of playing time, lack of success, lack of skill improvement, boredom, lack of fun and too much competitive stress.

Consider the costs. Some sports and activities require large investments in equipment and time, for both you and your child.

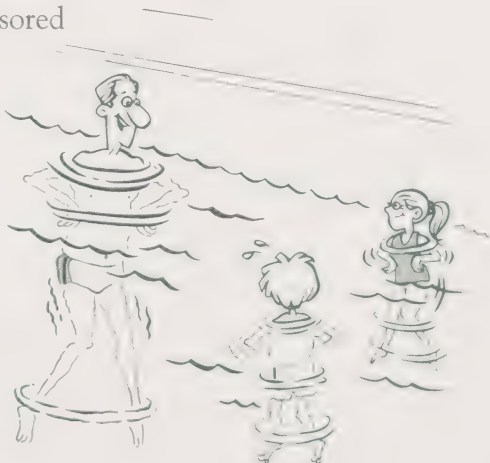
QUALITY CHECKLIST

DO YOUR CHILD'S PROGRAMS, INSTRUCTORS AND COACHES MEASURE UP?

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Formal, organized activities are a big part of active living for many children. If your child is enrolled in a program of organized physical activity or sport, use this checklist to rate the program and its instructors and coaches.

- ☐ The activity is sponsored by a respected organization in your community.
- ☐ The leader (coach or instructor) is certified by a sport or recreation organization.
- ☐ The leader is able to adjust the activity for children with different needs and abilities.



- ☐ The leader encourages fun and participation and not winning at all costs.
- ☐ Your child has many chances to experience success and fun.
- ☐ The play environment is safe and free from hazards.
- ☐ The right protective equipment is available and used by participants.
- ☐ Your child is having fun.
- ☐ Your child has a chance to learn and practise new skills.
- ☐ Sportsmanship and fair play are emphasized.
- ☐ You have talked to the leader and agree with his or her goals and beliefs.
- ☐ Your child has a chance to play new positions or try new activities.
- ☐ All players are given equal playing time.
- ☐ There is the right amount of competition (neither too much, nor too little).

If some of these elements are missing, discuss your concerns with the leader, club or organization.

ACTIVE LIVING FOR CHILDREN WITH A DISABILITY

Children with a disability include those who have added physical, mental and emotional needs. A disability may limit your child from taking part in some physical activities.

Regardless, the benefits of physical activity for children with a disability may be even greater than for other children. Remember, having fun is a key factor for enjoying physical activity.

Patience is required to let your child discover his or her own solutions.

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General Guidelines

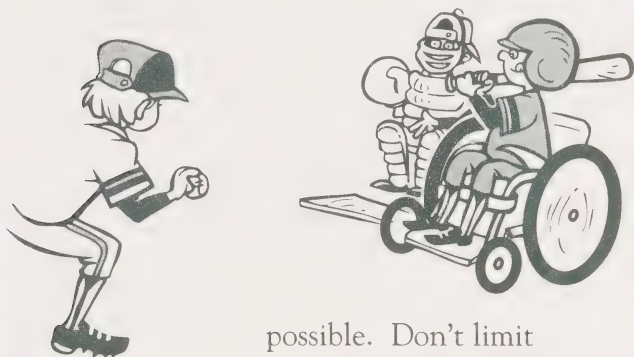
- Include your child in activities with other children. Encourage discussions about similarities and differences among all children. Help other children understand that not everyone participates in an activity in the same way.
- Meet with the activity leader to discuss your child's capabilities, needs and expectations.
- Allow your child to be challenged. Encourage your child to keep trying if a task is difficult but can be done. Offer only as much help as necessary or when safety is a concern. Celebrate success and progress!
- Contact the Active Living Alliance for Canadians with a Disability. The Alliance can

provide help and resources on adapting activities, leadership training and useful contacts in your community.

Here are some other tips for children with specific needs:

Physical Disabilities

- Use equipment and a setting that lets your child participate as fully and independently as



possible. Don't limit important childhood experiences by being too cautious.

- Let your child explore how to do the activity using different body parts or equipment. Offer helpful suggestions and try new ways of doing things.
- Keep activities short at the start to allow your child to build up endurance and confidence.

Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities

- Encourage your child to participate with other children in group activities. Encourage other children to play with your child.
- Be specific, brief and precise with instructions. Break activities down into small parts to increase

the chances of success. Review and repeat activities several times before changing.

- Ask groups like the Canadian Special Olympics for help in meeting your child's needs. Check in your phone book or ask your recreation department for details.

Visual Disabilities

- Use activities that encourage senses other than seeing, touching, hearing and smelling. Allow time for your child to get a "feel" for the activity and memorize the location of key landmarks.

- Describe what's happening and what will happen next. Address your child by name before giving instructions.

- Show your child how team/playmates can be located through clapping, calling or wearing a wrist bell. Use sound-producing equipment (either homemade or commercial) to increase your child's enjoyment.

- Describe new surroundings to your child.

Identify hazards such as open stairwells and ledges.

- Keep equipment in the same place for the length of an activity so that your child can get to know its location.



Hearing Disabilities

- Reduce background noise. Avoid standing in front of a window or other source of light when speaking to your child; doing so darkens the face and hinders communication.
- Encourage your child to play with other children. Pair your child with a playmate for outdoor activities like skiing or hiking.
- Demonstrate activities often. Using visual cues (hand signals, coloured flags and signs) improves communication for all children.

With active living,
every action counts!
Both you and your child
benefit from active living.

CONTACTS AND COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Organizations

Active Living Canada
1600 James Naismith Drive
Gloucester, Ontario
K1B 5N4
Tel: (613) 748-5749
Fax: (613) 748-5734

Active Living Alliance for
Canadians with
a Disability
1600 James Naismith Drive
Gloucester, Ontario
K1B 5N4
Tel: (613) 748-5747
Fax: (613) 748-5782

Canadian Association for
Health, Physical
Education, Recreation
and Dance (CAHPERD)
Quality Daily Physical
Education
1600 James Naismith Drive
Gloucester, Ontario
K1B 5N4
Tel: (613) 748-5622
Fax: (613) 748-5737

Canadian Home and School
Federation
858 Bank Street
Suite 104
Ottawa, Ontario
K1S 3W3
Tel: (613) 234-7292
Fax: (613) 234-3913

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In Your Community

YMCA YWCA
Scouts Canada
Departments of Recreation

Boys and Girls Club
Girl Guides of Canada
Parent Resource Centres

